

WCoB Competition entry
Pattern Darning
Midwinter Coronation A.S. XLX
by TH Lady Miriam bat Shimeon

Pattern darning is an embroidery method that weaves contrasting thread done in running stitch in and out of the ground fabric to form patterns. The stitches are done in reverse order line by line, much like a modern dot matrix printer.

Some of the earliest pattern darning was done in Fatimid/Ayyubid ruled Egypt, which is from early 12th century onwards. Many designs can be found on samplers (such as item EA 1984.479 and EA 1984.495 in the Ashmolean Museum) as well as textile remnants still retaining embroidery.

Marianne Ellis has stated that pattern darning was used to decorate household items (such as linens, table clothes and pillow cases etc.) as well as clothing¹. The different types of decorations such as bands of different colour from the ground cloth, thin simple borders or even fringed ends on clothing was mentioned in the Cairo Geniza trousseau documents². These designs were also used in Mamluk ruled Egypt from the 13th to 15th centuries, although the designs have increased in number and complexity.

The item I embroidered is a handkerchief, also known as a *mandil* in Arabic. Ellis states that handkerchiefs were used to wrap small valuables to keep hidden in the sleeves. There is also records of them in a 13th century Cairo Geniza document as well as being sold in the Cairo bazaar³. Handkerchiefs were also known to be handed out as gifts by the Court, known as “*khil’a*”⁴.

There are several *mandil* in the Ashmolean Museum such as item EA 1984.400 (done in double running stitch) and EA 1984.173, which has been pattern darned. However the embroidery I based my work on is Accession number EA 1984.474, also from the Mamluk time period.

The handkerchief is made from even weave linen, 28.5 by 26 cm. It is embroidered with brown and blue silk, in eight bands. The bands are continuous “s” shapes, which are linked to make trumpet leaves. Finally, all edges have been roll hemmed in flax.

My embroidery is 27cm by 25cm, slightly different dimensions to the extant piece, although I have rolled the hem on all sides. The thread chosen was Au Ver a Soie silk (d’Alger), in rusty red and yellow. I chose these colours as they were also used in period. Madder had been used in the Middle East since Alexandrian times and with a mordant of alum could create the rusty red colour⁵. Safflower (also used from Greek times) or weld (brought to Egypt by the Romans), when used with the mordant of alum would make a bright yellow⁶.

¹ Ellis, M. “Embroideries and Samplers from Islamic Egypt”, Ashmolean Museum Oxford 2001. Page 24

² Stillman, Y. and Stillman, N. “Arab Dress: From the Dawn of Time to Modern Times” 2nd ed. Brill, 2003. Page 58.

³ Ellis, M. “Embroideries and Samplers from Islamic Egypt”, Ashmolean Museum Oxford 2001. Page 49.

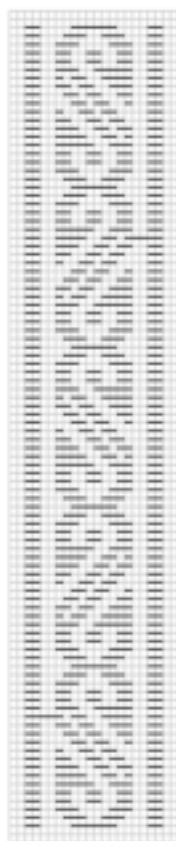
⁴ Stillman, Y. and Stillman, N. “Arab Dress: From the Dawn of Time to Modern Times” 2nd ed. Brill, 2003. Page 177.

⁵ Abdel-Kareem, O. “History of Dyes used in Different Historical Periods in Egypt”, Research Journal of Textile & Apparel, Nov 2012, Vol. 16 Issue 4. Page 85-6.

⁶ Ibid, page 85, 86, 87, 88 and 90.

I charted up the following design using the HD zoom available on the Ashmolean website. There is another version of the chart available in the newsletter of the Needleworkers Guild in the Kingdom of the West *Filum Aureum*, Fall A.S. XXXXI (2006) on page 8, but I didn't feel that the fine detail of the embroidery was captured by that chart.





Charted by Miriam Staples 2015.

Based on Ashmolean Accession # EA1984.474

http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/collection/8/per_page/100/offset/100/sort_by/relevance/category/textiles/start/993/end/1565/object/16041

Linen embroidered with pattern darned silk.

10th-15th Century Egypt.

Bibliography

Abdel-Kareem, O. "History of Dyes Used in Different Historical Periods of Egypt". Research Journal of Textile and Apparel, November 2012, Vol. 16 Issue 4. Accession # 84433481. Available for download here- <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/84433481/historydyes-used-different-historical-periods-egypt>.

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Stillman, Y. and Stillman, N. "Arab Dress: From the Dawn of Time to Modern Times". Brill, 2nd edition 2003. ISBN: 9004135936.